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REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR
CONSULTATIONS WITH
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) represents 120 million working people on all five continents and in countries at all levels of development. About two thirds of the trade union organizations affiliated to ICFTU are in developing countries.

As one of the largest and most representative non-governmental organizations, ICFTU, by virtue of its category I consultative status, has a long record of cooperation with the United Nations. Recent developments, notably the United Nations focus on social issues and on sustainable development, have greatly accentuated the need for reinforcing and enhancing this cooperation.

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* E/AC.70/1994/2.

While ICFTU welcomes the Economic and Social Council decision to review the consultative arrangements set out in its resolution 1296 (XLIV), recent experiences have given rise to serious concern that eventual changes in these arrangements might have results contrary to those being sought and weaken, rather than enhance, genuine NGO contribution.

ICFTU believes that the basic provisions of Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) remain valid and will need to be retained, if consultative status is to have any meaning. The placing of NGOs in different categories according to their representativeness and range of fields of competence is based on sound reasoning and practicality. An organization with a global constituency whose concerns cover the full range of activities of the Council, and indeed the entire United Nations, obviously functions in a manner very different from that of a smaller organization which concentrates on one issue.

The provision of Council resolution 1296 (XLIV), according to which "national organizations shall normally present their views through international non-governmental organizations to which they belong", is also based on realism and common sense. It would not seem rational to grant separate consultative status to national affiliates of organizations already in status. In the case of ICFTU alone, this would result in the addition of approximately 174 organizations, and it is easy to imagine that at that rate the number of NGOs would rapidly reach the million mark.

Accreditation to United Nations conferences has generally been handled in such a way as to allow for participation of relevant NGOs not in consultative status. Lately, this more liberal policy has tended to spill over to other meetings, resulting in a blurring of distinctions between organizations with global constituencies and national and local groups. This has seriously hampered the ability of major organizations to function effectively. Nowhere was this more in evidence than in the first substantive session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, where NGOs in consultative status lost their right to have their written statements issued as United Nations documents. They were also denied normal access to documentation and when requesting the floor, were pressured to form "coalitions" and "constituencies", notwithstanding the fact that international organizations, by definition, represent coalitions and networks. A number of speakers who were given the floor were simply identified as "an NGO representative" and presumed to speak on behalf of all NGOs present.

ICFTU submits that statements of ad hoc coalitions of organizations which basically represent a consensus reached among representatives who happen to be present at a particular meeting do not have the same weight as those of organizations with a global constituency and the potential to enlist massive support for the aims and activities of the United Nations. ICFTU statements, in fact, represent policy adopted by its statutory executive bodies.

While ICFTU welcomes the desire to involve NGOs from developing countries, we are seriously disturbed by the recent tendency to label organizations as "Northern" or "Southern" on the basis of the location of their headquarters. Clearly what matters is neither the site of their headquarters nor the nationality of their representatives to United Nations offices but their

constituencies and the reflection of these constituencies in their policy-making organs.

Not only ICFTU, but many other international organizations, are overwhelmingly composed of third world organizations and have their own regional groupings. For instance, ICFTU is usually represented in regional commissions - the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) - and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) by its own regional organizations. It would be most unfortunate if the United Nations were to establish procedures which would have the effect of devaluating and discouraging international solidarity in the non-governmental sector.

ICFTU is confident that ways can be found to enlarge and enhance cooperation between the United Nations and NGOs without curtailing the rights and privileges without which genuinely representative organizations are not able to exercise a significant function. One area where action would be welcome is that of participation in international conferences. Here greater consistency is clearly needed. While we understand the need for involving more specific interest groups, we nevertheless insist on the importance of making a distinction between NGOs representing major constituencies and smaller groups, and any recommendations to form coalitions should be reserved to the latter.

A very effective way of associating NGOs with the work of the United Nations is the inclusion of their representatives as advisers in governmental delegations. While only a few Member States have regularly followed this practice up to now, recent meetings of preparatory committees for conferences have shown that it is gaining ground, with positive results.

As regards the arrangements governing the day-to-day work of NGOs in consultative status, we urge the Working Group to take a realistic approach to any suggestions for change in order to ensure that action aimed at greater liberalization will not in effect lead to greater restrictions and open doors will not lead into a blind alley.